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KINSHASA PLEASE PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV KPKO UNSC IV

SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE - TENSE BUT CALM AND LIKELY TO
REMAIN THAT WAY IN THE NEAR TERM

Classified By: DCM VICENTE VALLE, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Cote d'Ivoire remains tense on the eve of the end of the current one-year mandate of President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Banny and a new UNSC resolution for the country. While there is no doubt that both Gbagbo and Banny's terms will be extended, doubts and fears linger over the relative authority of the President and Prime Minister under the renewed mandate and the status of the Ivoirian constitution. Gbagbo's camp is insisting that the constitution and the President's powers remain sacrosanct, while the opposition is calling for the suspension of the constitution and the rejection of Gbagbo or at least the paring back of his authority. The New Forces have declared that they will no longer recognize Gbagbo as president after October 31; they made a similar statement in October 2005.

¶2. (C) Rumors are rife in Abidjan about possible unrest by pro-Gbagbo militias (fed by threats and tough talk from some militia leaders) or opposition youth (who showed a willingness to take on the militias last July) and both the Ivoirian military (FANCI) and New Forces rebels (FAFN) have increased their state of alert. However, despite the nervousness, there are few signs that conflict or violence is imminent. It is highly unlikely that either military will attempt to launch an offensive as Gbagbo did in November 2004 and no indication that they are preparing to do so. While there is a greater possibility of violence by pro- or anti-Gbagbo youth, this too seems unlikely at this time. The heightened rhetoric is standard prior to a decision by the international community and is not per se a precursor to violence.

¶3. (C) The UNSC resolution is likely to be such that neither side will be completely happy with it, but also one that is unlikely to ignite violent protests. Interestingly, although Gbagbo's camp came away from Addis very critical of the AU Peace and Security Council's recommendations on October 17, it has since adopted a softer tone and indicated a willingness to accept a UNSC resolution along the lines of the PSC's after the French began pushing a tougher resolution in New York. We also believe that the opposition recognizes that Gbagbo will remain in office and will eventually accept this fact publicly.

¶4. (SBU) In addition, despite the threats by some hardliners, others on both sides are arguing for a more conciliatory approach. Young Patriots head Charles Ble Goude, for example, has said he eschews armed confrontation and Imam Idris Koudous, head of the National Islamic Council, called on opposition leaders to renounce violence during his televised sermon on Ramadan's Night of Destiny.

¶5. (C) We therefore anticipate no major unrest following October 31 or a new UNSC resolution. The situation is in fact reminiscent of the mood a year ago when Gbagbo's normal, five-year term as president was about to expire. At that time, too, there was much fear and nervousness, but nothing much happened. Violence is always possible and even probable at some time in the future, but there is little likelihood that it will occur at this time.

Hooks